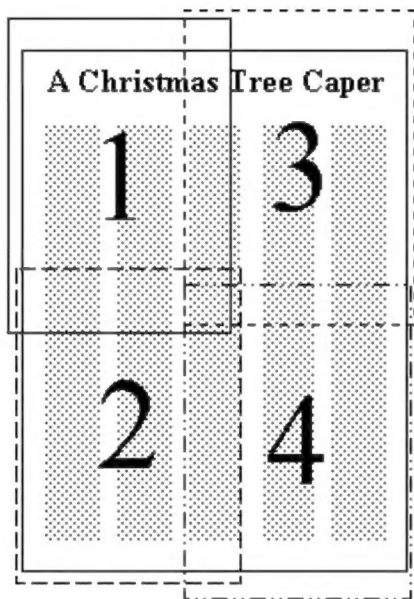


NOTE: This newspaper appearance was divided and enlarged to fill 8 ½" x 11" pages, roughly in the manner shown below.



TERRY



CHARLES, YOU'RE A FOOL. THESE HOT PORK CHOPS ARE COOL. SURE YOU WON'T TOY WITH SIX OR EIGHT...?

THANKS, CHUM. NOT HUNGRY... GUESS I'LL SNATCH SOME FRESH AIR...



The Best of Friends

By JACK RITCHIE

(Copyright 1955 by News Syndicate Co. Inc.)

IT WAS the last day of the Haley family's visit to Elm Falls and Jim Haley and I sat in the living room waiting for our wives to finish preparing sandwiches for the picnic.

"And another thing," I said. "In all the movies I've ever seen, the hometown boy who comes back claiming he's rich always turns out to be a fake."

He tapped his cigar on the edge of the ashtray. "Check with Dun & Bradstreet. If you can afford the telephone call, of course."

Clark and Jim's wife, Edna, came out of the kitchen with the picnic baskets.

"Don't you two boys ever get tired of that?" she asked.

"The trouble with small towns is that nothing ever happens," Jim said. "I'll bet you have to import your juvenile delinquents."

"Edna," I said, "tell me the truth. Don't you ever hanker to get back in your own little kitchen again?"

"No," she said. "I'd rather play canasta."

Jim and I picked up the baskets and went outside. My son, Ted, and Jim's son, Willie, both 12, were leaning against the front gate.

"My father bought me a pony," Willie said.

My son thought about that for a few seconds. "Well," he said slowly. "My father would get me one, too, but I happen to be allergic to them."

I patted him on the shoulder. "Good boy, Ted!"

A LITTLE

I scarcely have time to breathe."

"I understand, dear," my wife said. "Do you play much canasta?"

"I have to have some recreation, Clara, dear," Edna said, her voice slightly sharp. "After all, keeping a big house properly supervised is quite a job, let me tell you. All you have to worry about are those five small rooms."

"It's really a pleasure to look at your hands, dear," my wife said. "They're so nice and smooth. But then you don't have to wash dishes three times a day, do you?"

"Dad," Ted asked thoughtfully. "Have you and Mr. Haley always been friends?"

"Yes, son," I said. "Through thick and thin. Through measles, grade school, and high."

"The greatest of friends," Jim said. "And even now I'm not too proud to say that."

"Remember those days, Edna?" Clara asked. "We were always together, too. You and I."

"We certainly were," Edna said. "Remember how I always insisted on double dates so that you could get out once in a while, too?"

"Edna, dear," my wife said. "I'm afraid you're a little confused. I never had trouble getting dates for myself. I'm the one who insisted on dragging you along."

There was a half-minute of tightlipped silence and then Wil-

boy appears to be falling off the dock."

"By George," I said, as Ted fell off the end of it and into the water, "I believe you're right."

I took off my shirt. "Hold your breath, Ted!" I shouted. "I'll be there in a second."

"Dear . . ." my wife began.

I ran to the end of the pier, took off my shoes, and dived into the water. When I came up, I found that I'd overshot Ted by about 15 feet. I swam back, got a rescue hold on him and pulled him up to the ladder.

When I laid him down on the planking, everyone gathered around. My wife was eating a sandwich and sipping from a bottle of coke.

"Now this," I said to Willie, "is called artificial respiration. Hold still, Ted."

After about a minute, Ted coughed and sat up. "Gee, thanks, Dad," he said, his voice heavy

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A LITTLE HESITATION

While I was putting the baskets in the trunk of Jim's car, my son sidled up to me.

"Dad," he said, after a little hesitation, "you and Mr. Haley started out with practically the same thing, didn't you?"

I closed the lid of the trunk. "You have to consider the fact that he's four months older than I am, son. Who knows, when I'm his age I may have money, too."

All of us got into Jim's car and began the five-mile drive to Park's Lake.

"This is a brand new car," Willie said. "It's so new that it's next year's model. What year is your car, Ted?"

Ted cogitated before he spoke. "We don't like to rush into things," he said. "We always wait four or five years until a model's been proven good before we buy it."

We got to the lake in about 10 minutes and selected a solitary spot near the water. The blankets were spread out in the shade of an oak and we made ourselves comfortable.

"How about taking our shoes off and going wading?" Ted asked Willie.

Willie regarded the shoreline dubiously. "At home we have a private swimming pool. We don't have stones or weeds cluttering up the water."

Clara lifted the lid of one of the baskets. "Did I tell you that I baked a cake for the last church social, Edna?"

"Marvelous," Edna said. "I believe in working for the church and Jim does too. He bought a stained glass window for ours that cost over \$5,000."

"It was a chocolate cake," my wife said.

"We do our contributing in a monetary way," Edna said. "I'd like to donate my services, too, but I'm so busy all day long that

proud to say that."

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There was a half-minute of tightlipped silence, and then Willie said, "My father says that it's always nice to know you can buy what you haven't got."

Ted looked at me. "I think I'll take a walk down to the end of the pier," he said.

"That's right, son," I said. "Go ahead."

"I'm hungry," Willie said.

"Would you like some pineapple cake?" Edna asked her son. "I have some I bought just this morning."

CHOCOLATE LAYER CAKE

"Perhaps you'd prefer some chocolate layer cake?" Clara asked. "I baked it myself."

The two women eyed each other steadily and then by mutual telepathic agreement each cut a small sample from her cake and presented it to Willie.

Except for the wind in the trees, there was a complete silence while Willie tasted first the pineapple and then the chocolate.

He licked his fingers. "I'd like some more chocolate, please," he asked.

My wife expelled her breath and smiled. "Of course, Willie. That's a good boy."

"Why don't you ever eat chocolate cake at home, Willie?" his mother demanded.

"It's store bought," Willie said, "and don't taste the same."

Jim cleared his throat and tapped me on the shoulder. "Your

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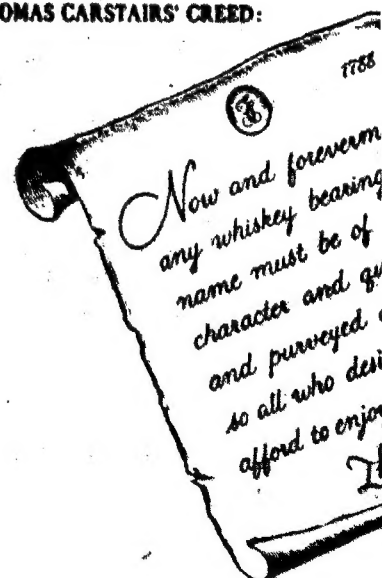
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"Now this," I said to Willie, "is called artificial respiration. Hold still, Ted."

After about a minute, Ted coughed and sat up. "Gee, thanks, Dad," he said, his voice heavy

with emotion. "You saved my life."

"Oh, it's nothing that any other red-blooded father wouldn't do for his son," I said.

Willie looked at his father. "Would you rescue me if I fell in, Dad?"

"Yes," I said. "How about that?"

"You know very well I can't swim a stroke," Jim said sourly.

"Perhaps you could hire someone," I suggested. "By the way, Jim. If you can't swim, just why have you got a swimming pool?" I asked pleasantly.

"Because everybody else in our neighborhood has one," he said, his voice rising. "It's a matter of prestige."

"Dad," Willie asked, "suppose nobody's around. Who would you hire?"

We all left quite soon after that and later in the evening after Jim and his family had packed and were gone, the three of us

changed to slippers and relaxed.

"At least I won my round the honest way," Clara said. "The cake was delicious, if I do say so myself."

"You almost spoiled our kid with that sandwich and coke," I said. "It's all right to appear nonchalant, but that was almost too much."

"I'm sorry, dear," Clara said, "but you should have let me in on it ahead of time. I know that Ted can swim like a fish and so I didn't worry."

"It was something Dad and I cooked up," Ted said. "We can take just so much from that family."

Clara looked at us and smiled. Then she looked at her hands. "I wonder what it would be like to have nice smooth hands like Edna's."

Ted and I got the hint and we did the dishes for the next two weeks.

THE END

For the Man who cares
for whiskey of
superb quality and character

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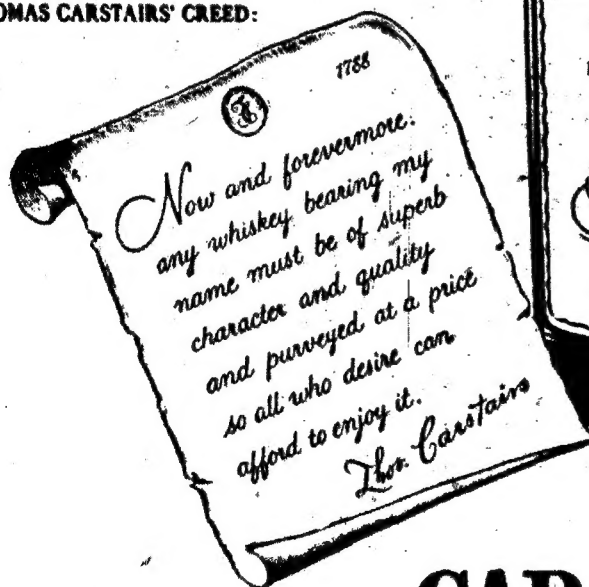


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